Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5936th meeting
Thursday, 17 July 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Bui The Giang	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Lammens
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Somdah
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Costa Rica	Ms. Villalobos
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Fieschi
	Indonesia	Mr. Mulyana
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Alakhder
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lukiyantsev
	South Africa	Ms. Lazouras
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Steele
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Letter dated 7 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2008/442)

Letter dated 11 July from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/455)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-42816 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of South Africa, in which he requests that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mrs. Lila Hanitra Ratsifandrihamanana, Permanent Observer of the African Union.

It is so decided.

I would like to remind all speakers, as I indicated in this morning's meeting, to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in this Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on this important and topical issue.

The issue has been on the Council's agenda for quite some time. We take note of the Secretary-General's latest country report on children and armed conflict and the annual report of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It is heartening to find that the continued engagement of the Security Council and the efforts of its Working Group have produced some tangible results and that many more, positive outcomes are in the offing. In that context, we note that certain countries and parties to conflicts have complied with the recommendations.

While we appreciate the activities of the Working Group, we would also like to see the discussion on its working methods and procedural issues completed quickly so that the Working Group can devote itself fully to its mandated activities. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Coomaraswamy, deserves our particular praise for her dedicated efforts in upholding the cause of children involved in armed conflicts.

In a recent field trip to a country emerging from conflict, I was struck by the shocking revelation of instances of voluntary or coerced recruitment of child soldiers in the conflict. I was struck by a story that a nine-year old, who was completely deaf and dumb, was using his toy of terror — in this instance, a loaded machine gun — to satisfy the thrill of killing. What prompts such actions? That is something that we need to ponder. We need to come up with solutions.

While many child soldiers are coerced into fighting, the induction of children into armed conflicts is often prompted by difficult socio-economic conditions. In that context, as also underlined in the concept paper before us, approaching the issue from a development perspective would be an effective way of addressing the problem in a more sustainable manner. While such a development approach should be a comprehensive one, there should be a particular focus on addressing the root causes of armed conflict from a proper perspective.

The vulnerable situation of children in post-conflict societies also needs special attention. For peace to be sustained, those children must be rehabilitated and reintegrated back into their communities more effectively. Reintegration and rehabilitation can be successful only if adequate incentives are given to child combatants to return to normal life. Reintegration would require instilling certain societal values as well as some psychosocial and ideological grooming of the returnees. Rehabilitation entails child protection and welfare.

National efforts in this context should be complemented by international assistance, including resource mobilization. The Peacebuilding Commission should have the issues of the rehabilitation and reintegration of children permanently on its agenda when taking up any country-specific configuration. The sharing of countries' best practices would be useful in formulating effective reintegration strategies.

The contribution of child protection advisers so far in nine peacekeeping and political missions can be regarded as significant progress. We would like to see such approaches incorporated in the other ongoing missions without delay.

The United Nations could explore the possibility of assisting national Governments in mobilizing a social movement in conflict-ridden and conflict-prone countries to develop social and moral resistance to the induction of children in armed conflict.

It is well documented that children suffer the most under unregulated sanction regimes. The Council

has a duty to ensure that sanctions do not affect the innocent. The issues of children under foreign occupation must also be appropriately addressed. There should be special provisions for girl children, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence.

Despite the United Nations system-wide response, the overall situation of children in situations of armed conflict remains a matter of grave concern. Ensuring compliance by non-State actors and armed groups remains a big challenge. We must try to address those issues in a more resolute manner.

Children are among the principal and the most hapless victims in all wars and civil conflicts. Armed conflicts hold terrible consequences for children's development and for the peace and stability of generations to come.

Mitigating measures will have limited success unless there is a genuine political will for conflict prevention. We, the international community, should join hands to work towards that end, and the Council in particular has a responsibility in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. Allow me to congratulate you on presiding over this meeting.

Uganda has been a proponent of identifying the causes of underage children finding their way into armed forces, in order to find a sustainable solution to the problem. We were quick to point out that even though the recruitment of children into our army was not institutionalized, we were not oblivious to the fact that some children, owing to the breakdown in institutional, social, economic and cultural values, managed to circumvent the system, present false information as to their age and be recruited. In most cases, the abject poverty in those areas led the parents to get their children employed in the armed forces by overstating their ages.

That was an issue that was, in the end, acknowledged by the Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and by the Secretary-General in his seventh report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established with the determination to put an end to impunity for perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole and contribute to the prevention of such crimes. The parties to the Rome Statute were also mindful of the millions of children, women and men who had been victims of unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity. Article 6 (e) of the Statute recognizes that forcibly transferring children of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group to another group with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the first group constitutes genocide. Uganda holds in the highest regard the mandate of the ICC to fight against impunity. It is with that in mind that Uganda was the first to make a referral.

In that same spirit of cooperation, the Ugandan Government has been engaged in various initiatives with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to put an end to the practice wherever it has been identified and to ensure the delistment of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and Local Defence Units (LDUs) — which have now been disbanded — from annex II of resolution 1612 (2005). In this regard, I am happy to report that the Ugandan Government and the Uganda Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting have vowed to start negotiations to iron out the few hitches inhibiting the finalization of the action plan. This will soon be completed.

We believe that, as far as Government cooperation goes, Uganda has exhibited an undeniable spirit of partnership in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005), regardless of the circumstances under which UPDF and LDU were included in Annex II to the resolution.

With regard to the sanctions or punishment regime, if it is to be believed that the motive for punitive measures against States accused of recruiting children into armed forces is actually to help the children, then a different approach, in my view, may have to be adopted. Demonizing countries and condemning Member States, even with the objective of ending impunity, will only delay and may derail an otherwise noble initiative.

Uganda is of the view that the fastest and most sustainable avenue for solving a problem is not by placing emphasis on punishment, but by engaging the

parties involved in dialogue. Sanctions only punish the most vulnerable of society and, as history will show, only serve to harden an accused State's resolve.

In conclusion, there can be no durable solution to a problem whose root causes have not been identified or contextualized or are ignored when they are pointed out. Issues like poverty, lack of vocational skills or even the total absence of registration systems for births in conflict areas are too serious to be pushed aside. I would like to reiterate that Uganda remains committed to the protection of the world's children who are affected by armed conflict, and to ensuring respect for international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

Mrs. Eilon Shahar (Israel): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your able stewardship of the Council this month and thank you for convening this important debate. I also wish to thank Ms. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Mulet, Ms. Venemen and Ms. Hunt for their informative statements and, more importantly, for their commitment and dedication to working on this issue before today's meeting. As others have mentioned, we would also like to commend the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, under the able stewardship of the representative of France, for its important work.

Children are primary victims in many cases of armed conflict. They are the targets of conflict and, increasingly, its instruments. While the United Nations has focused on the issue of children and armed conflict since the 1996 Graça Machel report, followed by Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) and many others, children are still involved in armed conflict as soldiers, with an alarming increase in cases of sexual violence and the culture of impunity.

In this regard, we welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) last month, which recognized the vulnerability of children in armed conflict to rape and other acts of sexual violence. Israel, for its part, assigns great importance to the protection of children from violence and armed conflict, as evidenced in its signature of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on armed conflict. Indeed, we maintain a comprehensive system of laws, protecting children's rights across the board, and pay careful attention to the issue of children and armed conflict also through our vast non-governmental organization and advocacy networks.

Since the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, we has also worked closely with the United Nations to promote a constructive dialogue on this issue. My delegation has followed closely the Special Representative's recent travels around the world and her work to raise awareness about this issue.

Despite the evident progress, lessons learned from previous disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes for children are not being applied to armed conflict as they should. Child soldiers continue to be overlooked or do not have formal access to DDR processes, and thousands of returning soldiers do not receive demobilization assistance. Long-term reintegration is severely under-funded, and girls in particular are routinely neglected, despite their involvement in the conflict as fighters or subjection to severe sexual violence.

At the same time, there have been noticeable achievements in protecting children, inter alia, through Security Council resolutions that I have mentioned and the work of the International Criminal Court. The latter has issued arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity that include the forced enlistment and use of children in hostilities. Similarly, the Special Court for Sierra Leone's decision on Brima, Kamara and Kanu marked the first time an international criminal tribunal has invoked the offence of conscripting child soldiers.

The scourge of global terrorism means that civilians today are increasingly vulnerable and threatened, both from indiscriminate and targeted attacks. Children have also often become the object of terrorist interest for purposes of recruitment, incitement to violence and human shielding.

In our region, despite the "state of calm", Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip continue to fire rockets indiscriminately at Israeli cities in the southern envelope, including Sderot, placing children in particular peril. In Sderot, up to 94 per cent of children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The psychological effects are no less damaging than physical wounds. Indeed, until last month, the frequency of rocket attacks since June 2007 reached an average of one attack every three hours.

Israeli civilians are not only the victims of indiscriminate attacks; they are likewise targeted by terrorists. In March 2008, a Palestinian terrorist stormed a rabbinical seminary in Jerusalem and murdered eight boys in cold blood. The Security Council must unequivocally and unconditionally condemn such terrorist attacks and call for an end to violence against Israeli civilians and to impunity for those who commit acts of terrorism.

These terrorists do not even care or show concern for their own populations. Last month, on 12 June, Palestinian media reported that terrorists accidentally detonated a bomb in a weapons factory housed in a residential building in Beit Lahiya. Ten Palestinians were killed in the explosion and several dozens were wounded, among them many children, including the apartment building owner's four-month-old baby daughter. Hamas has long operated in civilian areas, using civilians as shields, and has commandeered schools and houses of worship for making weapons and planning and carrying out attacks. As evidenced, terrorism is a grave threat to all children — in our area, both to Palestinian and to Israeli children.

As many child soldiers are found within the ranks of armed groups, existing initiatives have limited impact in protecting children from recruitment and use in conflict. By their nature, armed and terrorist groups reject pressure and persuasion to end such practices. Hence, the international community must advocate for context-specific and more sophisticated strategies to address the practice of involving children in armed conflict.

On previous occasions, my delegation has raised the issue of indoctrination and incitement to violence, of youth and children in particular. Indeed, while we tend to focus our energies primarily on the conscription and use of children in hostilities, children need protection from all aspects of armed conflict, including programmatic attempts to brainwash them. In recent months and before, Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV has repeatedly called upon children to form human shields and carryout attacks and violence against Israel. Similarly, Hamas's summer camps are notorious for their indoctrination of children with propaganda, hate and violence.

For the international community to truly deliver on the issue of children and armed conflict, utilizing, inter alia, the development approach, we must holistically confront the conditions that condone and promote violence in society. This must be a shared commitment on the part of all States, parties and people. As Nelson Mandela once said,

> "No one is born hating another person because of the color of their skin, religion or background. Hatred and intolerance have to be learned and, if they can be learned, so can love and tolerance, which are more natural to the human heart. Even in the grimmest times I have seen glimmers of humanity, which have reassured me that man's goodness is the flame that can never be extinguished."

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Kim (Korea): At the outset, let me express my appreciation for the work of the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to end violations against children in armed conflicts. My delegation would also like to commend the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for her dedication to the alleviation and ultimate resolution of the plight of children in armed conflict.

A statement by the President of the Security Council adopted in February this year (S/PRST/2008/6) underlined the importance of the full, safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and goods and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all children affected by armed conflict. It also expressed concern about the widespread and systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children — in particular girls — during situations of armed conflict.

The prevalence of sexual violence in armed conflict has become horrible. The Secretary-General's report highlighted the fact that girls, and sometimes boys, have been targeted with various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, during armed conflicts. Alarmingly, close to 60 per cent of the victims of sexual violence are children in various areas of armed conflict, and sexual violence — in particular rape — has been deliberately used for political and military purposes in some conflict areas.

Unless the international community — specifically, the Security Council, which is the only body capable of taking forceful measures — responds

with strong determination to end such violations, the situation cannot be improved. In that regard, the adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) on women and peace and security, and sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, is a very positive development.

The scope of the monitoring and reporting mechanism of resolution 1612 (2005) should be expanded to include sexual violence as a trigger for listing a party in the Secretary-General's annexes. That is why many delegations welcomed the adoption of last February's presidential statement, which demonstrated the Security Council's readiness to review the relevant provisions of resolution 1612 (2005). We anticipate that a result will appear soon in the form of a new resolution.

Ending impunity is a critical element in addressing any kind of violations. Impunity for parties to an armed conflict, as well as for individual perpetrators, should be ended. In order to do so, the Security Council must refer systematic and persistent violators of children to the International Criminal Court, while paying full attention to the development of national justice mechanisms.

Effective implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) is also part of the critical work being done by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and of the consideration of the Security Council itself. The role of the Working Group could be further strengthened if it addressed concrete measures, such as the recommendation of targeted measures to the Security Council, in addition to monitoring their implementation.

Important new actors are emerging in the area of addressing the issue of children in armed conflict. Peacekeeping operations and political missions — particularly their child protection advisers — are included on the list. My delegation believes that their role is very important not only for the full implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, but also for the effective prevention of violations and for more comprehensive protection of children.

In that regard, the Security Council and the Secretary-General should send a strong message to the head of each mission to provide solid leadership. Above all, each national Government should take ultimate responsibility for protecting its own children. In that connection, technical and financial assistance should be provided for capacity-building, and Governments should cooperate fully with the Security Council in preparing and implementing action plans, including by establishing an effective and transparent justice mechanism.

Finally, my delegation would like to discuss the development approach, as emphasized in the concept paper. We fully agree that the international community needs a broader strategy for the protection of children from the perspective of both prevention and development. If we are to effectively address the complex issue of children in armed conflicts, ending violations, carrying out recovery and reintegration processes and protecting children over the long term require the full cooperation of all relevant bodies, including the Security Council; the Office of the Secretary-General; peacekeeping operations; political missions; the Peacebuilding Commission; humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and non-governmental organizations; and development actors. That is especially true at the field level; community-based programmes and the participation and contributions of non-governmental organizations are critical.

Today's open discussion on children and armed conflict should make a substantive contribution to the deliberations of the Security Council, as did the most recent open debate on that subject. The Republic of Korea looks forward to a new draft resolution that will move that most critical process forward.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): We are very grateful to you, Sir, and to the Vietnamese presidency for convening today's open debate. We share with other speakers the desire to make our views known to the Council, because the issue of children in armed conflict has been a priority area of our foreign policy and especially of our commitment within the United Nations. We understand your advice and will follow it as we present a shortened version of the text that is currently being circulated.

You have invited us, Sir, to express our views on how the Security Council, the United Nations as a whole and the international community can better deliver on the protection of children affected by armed

conflict. Austria fully agrees that we need to look at the root causes of conflict in order to find sustainable solutions. Our interventions, I think we all agree, must be comprehensive and effective.

We also agree that there is an imperative need to improve support for and protection of children. The effective reintegration of children associated with armed groups is of particular concern. Therefore, the situation of children must be systematically included in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. The specific needs and capacities of girls have to be given special attention. The Austrian Government is committed to further contributing to efforts in support of affected children and is, as members are aware, supporting a number of projects implemented by United Nations partners and at the bilateral level.

The protection of children in armed conflict is not only a humanitarian concern, but also a significant peace and security issue. The protection of children must therefore be systematically considered in peace agreements and in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions. Austria welcomes the increasing deployment of child protection advisers over the past few years. We also actively support ongoing efforts within the United Nations system to further develop good practices and guidance for their work.

Indeed, the Security Council has an important role to play in providing effective protection to children in conflict situations. We wish to congratulate the Working Group, under French chairmanship, on its outstanding work, which is documented in the annual report now before the Council. Over the past six months, much time and energy has been spent on procedural issues. Therefore, we hope that the Working Group can now return to a greater focus on effective measures to protect children. More resources are needed for all actors concerned.

Austria would like to encourage the Council to ensure respect for its resolution 1612 (2005) and for all its previous resolutions on this issue. The fact that there is a long list of persistent violators is of increasing concern. We raised that concern at the last open debate on this subject, held in February, and we feel that we must do so again today.

This situation demands further action by the Security Council to strengthen the rule of law and to end impunity. We support the Secretary-General's call to make full use of the range of measures and tools available to the Council. We also call on the Security Council and on Member States to fully use accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, to bring to justice perpetrators of violations against children.

In this context, I would like to draw attention to the final report of the Austrian Initiative on the Security Council and the rule of law, which contains 17 concrete recommendations on how the Security Council could strengthen the rule of law in its various fields of activity. The report was recently issued as a document of the United Nations (S/2008/270) and is available in all official languages.

Austria also supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that equal weight be given to all categories of grave violations against children. As a first step, the crime of rape and grave sexual violence should be introduced as an additional element to trigger the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Together with many other speakers, we have laid out the reasons for that approach. Those reasons have gained even more weight in the meantime with the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence during and after armed conflict.

Austria believes that the Security Council should therefore carry forward its intention to further strengthen the framework for the protection of children by reviewing the relevant provisions of its resolutions and initiating work on a new resolution to increase the efficiency of its actions.

The future of our children depends on our response to the challenges before us today. Austria will continue to work closely with the United Nations and all our other partners to improve the situation of children, especially those affected by armed conflict.

In concluding, I would like to commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for her activities, dedication, engagement and for the many endeavours she has undertaken to improve the plight of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Nicaragua would like to

thank Viet Nam for convening this very important meeting. The delegation of Nicaragua regards this debate in the Security Council as one more opportunity to call attention to the tragic evil that embroils hundreds of thousands of children in armed conflict around the world, depriving them of their family life, their childhood, their education, their health and above all, in most cases of the simple opportunity to live.

Over the past few years, there has been much discussion on that topic and tangible progress has been acknowledged, including the creation of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the adoption of commitments and plans of action by countries affected by armed conflict.

Nonetheless, many challenges remain to be faced. Moreover, we must not ignore the importance of sustainable reintegration into communities and family, in which education plays a decisive role as a factor for peace. Greater efforts must be made to ensure the right to education in emergency situations. Education has often been ignored in situations of armed conflict. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal on education, we must give more attention to the fact that education is currently not part of emergency response. At the present time, two thirds of the children of the world who are not in school live in countries affected by conflict.

Above and beyond all of those endeavours and the challenges that we face, if we really wish to put an end to the participation of children in armed conflict, we need to tackle the problem at its root — conflict itself. We agree with what has been said by many delegations and by the presidency of the Security Council in its statement issued in February, in which the need was stressed to establish a broad-ranging strategy of prevention aimed at attaining sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

What is needed is to seek urgently an alternative to unbridled capitalism, which exacerbates conflicts to the benefit of the economic interests of the arms industries or those that extract natural resources, which are ultimately the greatest beneficiaries of the suffering and death caused by armed conflict.

Lastly, my delegation would encourage all interested parties to continue to foster a constructive dialogue with the parties to conflict, which would yield tangible benefits for boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Frommelt (Liechtenstein): We thank you, Sir, for organizing this important and timely open debate and for distributing an excellent concept paper. We also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and her Office for their dedication in advancing the work of the United Nations on that topic.

Liechtenstein has been actively involved in the efforts of the United Nations to address the plight of children affected by armed conflict since the very beginning. As a member of the group of friends of children affected by armed conflict, we will continue to do so and view this open debate as a further step that should lead to a substantive new resolution and towards a future agreement on the use of targeted measures against those responsible for the worst violations.

Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) established a monitoring and reporting mechanism for serious violations of the rights of the child at the field level, as well as a Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict here in New York. While that decision has already proven its positive effects on the ground, it is important to maintain the political momentum and to further develop and enhance tools aimed at improving the safety and security of children affected by armed conflict. As foreseen in resolution 1612 (2005), the monitoring and reporting mechanism provides reliable information on situations listed in annexes I and II of the reports of the Secretary-General, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence against children, attacks against schools and hospitals, the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access.

However, only one of those six grave violations — the recruitment and use of child soldiers — currently triggers the inclusion of countries in the annexes of the reports. We therefore reiterate our call to treat all six types of grave violations on an equal basis as triggers for inclusion in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports. The current differentiated treatment of those violations is, in fact, difficult to understand in the light of the universality of human

rights and the principles of international humanitarian law.

Any measures taken by the Working Group in response to grave violations of the rights of the child have to be complemented by effective enforcement. One option worth considering in that regard is the expansion of the Working Group's mandate to recommend targeted measures, including arms embargoes, bans on military assistance and the imposition of travel restrictions on individuals.

With regard to the working methods of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we are concerned by the slowdown in the publication of the Working Group's conclusions. While in 2007 conclusions were published at intervals of two to three months, this year we have not seen any conclusions since February. We understand that the procedural issues that led to the delay have been solved and expect more conclusions to be adopted during the second half of this year.

Liechtenstein also supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General, contained in his last report to the Council (S/2007/757), to refer to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation and prosecution the violations of the rights of children that fall within the Court's jurisdiction.

Incidentally, this open debate coincides with the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, and anniversary activities are under way in parallel to the discussions in the Council Chamber. It is therefore most appropriate to recall that the Rome Statute of the ICC, among many other significant advances in the area of international criminal justice, also set a milestone for the fight to end impunity for massive violations of the rights of children. The specific references to sexual violence and the conscription and enlistment of child soldiers in articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute concerning crimes against humanity and war crimes must be highlighted in that connection.

The practical work of the ICC, in particular with respect to the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in northern Uganda, has already had a positive impact on the ground and is setting important precedents. When the first trial commences, hopefully later this year, the fight against the involvement of children in armed conflicts will gain additional prominence and draw even stronger international attention.

The ICC is therefore playing a supportive role in many areas where the Council has been actively engaged for many years. Other examples are the protection of civilians and the issue of sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict, recently addressed specifically in resolution 1820 (2008). The ICC's role is independent, but also complementary to the mandate given to the Security Council and in keeping with the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. We therefore hope that the Council will continue to give political backing to the ICC in carrying out its mandate under the Rome Statute.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict. My appreciation goes also to the valuable presentations made this morning by Special Representative Coomaraswamy, Executive Director Veneman, Assistant Secretary-General Mulet and Ms. Hunt.

Since the Council first took up this issue about 10 years ago, we have been heartened by the progress made towards protecting children who have the misfortune to be caught in the midst of armed conflict. For example, important precedents have been set at the International Criminal Court and the Special Court for Sierra Leone to put an end to impunity for crimes against children, particularly the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups. The monitoring and reporting mechanism established by the Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the child protection advisers in the peacekeeping and political missions have all contributed to achieving concrete results. The dialogue amongst the parties concerned led to the release of more than 3,000 child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire. In Chad and the Central African Republic, this May an agreement was reached by the parties to the conflict to release child combatants.

Despite some of those achievements, we are deeply concerned about the plight of an estimated 250,000 children who are still forced to serve in armed forces and armed groups. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/757) and the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (A/62/228) highlighted emerging critical issues of

concern, including the lack of security in and around camps for internally displaced persons and refugees and the illegal detention of children for alleged association with armed groups.

Those children affected by armed conflict, who have been deprived of their families and of appropriate education, should be given every opportunity to enjoy normal civilian life. Post-conflict peacebuilding must address the lives and livelihoods of such children and ensure their full reintegration into communities. It is indispensable to provide not only physical protection but also basic human services. We should pay particular attention to alleviating the factors at the community level that are likely to lead to the recurrence of conflicts, such as discrimination against former child soldiers and the lack of productive economic activities for them. Physical and mental rehabilitation, vocational training and expanded educational opportunities should be provided to empower those victims. In post-conflict situations, Governments have the primary responsibility to lead the way by formulating and implementing child rights-based policies, while communities and civil society play an important role in building a climate of reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Peacebuilding Commission can support national efforts to address the needs of children. For example, the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi has made specific commitments addressing the needs of child soldiers and to promote their human rights in the context of transitional justice in response to Special Representative Coomaraswamy's briefing at the country-specific meeting. In the case of Sierra Leone, the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework recognizes that the education, employment and empowerment of youth are critical and priority issues.

At the last open debate on children and armed conflict here in February, the Council issued a presidential statement in document S/PRST/2008/6, inviting all parties concerned to enhance their exchange of information about programmes and best practices on the reintegration and rehabilitation of children. The Peacebuilding Commission, with its diverse stakeholders, is in a position to provide valuable support to develop a coordinated and integrated approach to achieve durable peace.

Children are the most vulnerable members of society when conflict breaks out. The concept of human security, focusing on the safety and security of the individual, which Japan promotes wholeheartedly, provides a vitally important perspective for the protection and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict. An integrated approach based on that concept is highly relevant to the entire process. Japan believes that those endeavours will, in turn, contribute to the international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. For instance, at the recent G8 summit, leaders stressed the importance of the enhancement of human security and the promotion of good governance in achieving those goals.

In mainstreaming the human security approach, Japan has been providing assistance and support to the programmes aimed at supporting former child soldiers and victims of sexual exploitation and violence in many countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Liberia. In addition, through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, Japan supports capacity-building in local communities to build durable child-friendly environments, for instance, in Kenya and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development was also an occasion to address the importance of ensuring human security as a top priority.

Political leaders in Africa and in many other parts of the world agreed the importance of approaching seamless peacebuilding efforts from a human-centred perspective, encompassing conflict prevention, early warning, conflict resolution and the prevention of relapses into conflict, all of which contribute to durable peace. Equally crucial are a smooth transition between one phase and the next and the creation of interdependence between security, human rights and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Swedén and Norway.

Children bear the least responsibility for armed conflicts, yet when conflicts arise, they suffer the most. We therefore commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her valuable work. Through her tireless efforts, she lends a voice to children who otherwise would not be heard.

The Nordic countries reiterate their unequivocal endorsement of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2007/757) concerning child rights and the role of child protection in future peacekeeping missions. Each of the six categories of grave violations set out in resolution 1612 (2005) must be addressed with equal resolve. We must act to put an end to all assaults on the human dignity of children.

Women and girls constitute the largest and most vulnerable group of victims in armed conflicts. Therefore, both those groups deserve our constant attention. In line with the recommendations of the report (S/2007/757) of the Secretary-General and of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we ask that sexual and gender-based violence be included on the list of violations that trigger listing in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports.

We recognize the absolute importance of resolution 1612 (2005) and the mechanisms set up in its wake. We welcome the reports of the Special Representative announcing the release of hundreds of children from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad. We also welcome the reports of progress made in Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, we remain deeply concerned at the high number of violations against children in the Sudan, including their recruitment by armed forces and groups, and rape and sexual violence, especially in Darfur.

Although promising progress has been made in some areas, there often remains a gap between words and deeds, between United Nations resolutions and actions by affected Member States. The monitoring and reporting mechanism provides the Security Council with reliable information on grave violations of child rights. With that knowledge comes responsibility. The Security Council should therefore seriously consider effective targeted measures against those who commit grave violations against children. We call on the Working Group to explore the full range of measures to hold persistent perpetrators responsible, whether they fall short of their own action plan objectives or choose to ignore the mechanism altogether.

Increased efforts are needed in order to end impunity for perpetrators of crimes against children. We welcome the progress made by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in persecuting individuals suspected of grave violations of the rights of the child. Nevertheless, effective national courts are also needed. Governments should benefit from the competence and capacity of the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism. We encourage the Security Council to refer violations against children in armed conflict to the ICC for investigation and prosecution when national Governments continuously fail to address such crimes.

The body of international humanitarian and human rights instruments leaves us with strong moral, political and legal obligations that must lead to action to provide a protective environment for the development of children, enriching their childhoods, expanding their opportunities and inspiring hope in our common future. The recently concluded Convention on Cluster Munitions, which will open for signature in December of this year, and the ongoing negotiations within the framework of the Convention on Conventional Weapons will, hopefully, serve as effective tools to that end.

The Nordic countries encourage the Security Council to ensure that it pays equal attention to all children affected by armed conflict. Procedural arguments concerning whether or not a specific situation is on its agenda should not undermine the Security Council's ability to discuss the plight of all children affected by armed conflict and, if necessary, to act accordingly.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Matussek (Germany): Germany fully aligns itself with the statement delivered this morning by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union.

Let me start by commending the Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council for putting the important item of children and armed conflict on the agenda of the Council. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Secretary-General and to his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for their dedicated engagement in taking this important issue forward. I would also like to again thank France in its capacity as Chair of the Security Council Working Group.

As the Council is aware, the German Government has always attached great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, and in

particular to the situation of children affected by armed conflicts. In the context of conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation, Germany finances and implements a number of projects to counter the recruitment of child soldiers and to promote their reintegration into civilian life, for instance in the Sudan and Nepal. We welcome the very significant progress made by the international community on that issue, but at the same time we are acutely aware of the necessity to redouble our efforts and to move the agenda forward.

The Security Council has made impressive progress on this issue since it was first put on its agenda, 10 years ago. In particular, the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) in 2005 is rightfully regarded as a milestone in creating an effective international monitoring and reporting mechanism on the issue of children and armed conflict. Progress so far shows that the mechanism is working well. Some parties to conflict listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports have shown increased consideration of the issue. Some have even adopted action plans commensurate with the United Nations recommendations pertaining to the use of child soldiers and illegal recruiting practices. What is more, the monitoring and reporting mechanism also provides Member States with ample information and evidence of grave violations in the six major categories of violations against children, while focusing on the illegal recruitment and use of children as child soldiers.

However, important challenges remain. We believe that the Security Council should seriously start to discuss ways to take the issue of children and armed conflict forward. In our view, such a discussion should take up the following three points.

First, we should address all aspects related to grave violations against children in armed conflict, including the issue of sexual violence against children. That issue deserves our undivided attention. Perpetrators should be included in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports. In that context, we welcome the recent adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Secondly, we must speak in clear language with parties to conflicts that keep appearing on the lists of perpetrators and with those parties that have chosen to ignore persistent calls to cease their illegal practices with regard to children in armed conflict. In our view, the Security Council should consider ways and means of imposing targeted measures against the main perpetrators. That should also imply the referral of serious violations to the International Criminal Court in cases where national systems fail to provide adequate protection for children in armed conflict.

Thirdly and finally, more attention should be paid by the Security Council to the mainstreaming of the issue of children and armed conflict in United Nations peacekeeping and political missions alike, for instance through child protection advisers and enhanced cooperation with the relevant United Nations actors, such as UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Finally, although it is of the utmost importance that the United Nations system as a whole continue to address the root causes of conflict affecting children — such as, inter alia, poverty, the lack of development and the lack of good governance — we believe that the Security Council should remain focused on a rights-based approach. That means the full implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, as set out in resolution 1612 (2005). Germany will remain engaged on the issue of children and armed conflict within the Security Council and with like-minded partners beyond.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ghana.

Mr. Tachie-Menson (Ghana): I would like to thank this month's Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council for organizing this debate. Allow me also to express my delegation's appreciation to the Chairperson of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for the annual report on the activities of the Working Group. Ghana remains convinced that the Working Group has a key responsibility in moving forward the children and armed conflict agenda by proposing stronger and more effective recommendations for the Council's consideration. We note with satisfaction that the sustained activity of the Council's Working Group has resulted in definitive conclusions and recommendations. We regret, however, the recent inertia in the Working Group's discussions, as that development may hinder progress. We hope that the desire to make positive differences in the lives of

children affected by armed conflict will continue to be the guiding principle in the Group's deliberations. We express our support for the Chairman's recommendation calling for increased Secretariat support for the Working Group's effective and efficient functioning.

While acknowledging that the engagement of the Security Council has yielded some tangible results, the overall situation of children affected by armed conflict remains worrisome. The recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups continue to be a cause of concern. Numerous children have been killed and injured as a result of conflict, sexual violence against children and attacks on schools are on the increase in conflict situations, humanitarian access is restricted and aid to those unfortunate victims cannot be assured in many conflict areas. Obviously, more remains to be done to ensure the practical implementation of resolution 1612 (2005). The effective closing of the gaps in the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005) will require concerted action by all stakeholders, including affected States, parties to conflict, United Nations entities, peacekeeping and support units and the international community as a whole.

There should be no impunity for those who target children during armed conflict. The Secretary-General's report in document S/2007/757 strongly emphasizes national action to bring to justice individuals responsible for grave violations against children and to end impunity for such violations. The prime responsibility for investigating and prosecuting the perpetrators of such acts falls upon State authorities. Clearly, there is a need to build the capacity of national security and legal actors, including by increasing the provision of human and financial resources to the concerned authorities to strengthen their capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes against children. However, it is apparent that, where State authorities lack the ability to carry out those functions, the international community should play its role without fail.

Ghana continues to place emphasis on the effective implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. In order to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis, resources should be mobilized for programmes aimed at the sustainable reintegration of child survivors of conflict into their societies. It is also critical for DDR programmes to include primary health care, counselling and social support to address the special needs of girls in the context of armed conflict and the specific problem of sexual violence. Also, a sustained investment in development, especially in education and skills training, will secure the successful reintegration of children into their communities and prevent recruitment. Such programmes should include employment support and income-generating projects for former combatants. There is also an urgent need for the rehabilitation of school buildings and the provision of school materials to support continued schooling and the provision of life and vocational skills for children who have left school.

In addition, increased attention must be paid to sexual and gender-based violence, since the sexual exploitation of children in conflict situations has become widespread. It is significant to recall the Council's adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence during and after armed conflict. Under that resolution, we have an important opportunity to create a more systematic approach to protecting women and girls from sexual violence during conflict, as well as to providing timely and sustainable intervention. Our delegation's expectation is that the implementation of the resolution will take cognizance of the relevant thematic issues on the Council's agenda, including children in conflict situations.

We wish to applaud the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. The positive nature of the contacts and discussions of the Special Representative with respective Governments during her country visits have had the necessary impact by ensuring better collaboration on the protection of children.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that children affected by armed conflict, like all other children of the world, should have the right to live and to dream of a better future.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the delegation of Viet Nam for its initiative to convene this debate, as well as for the preparation of the document previously circulated as a contribution to the discussion. I would also like to congratulate the Deputy

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, for his work leading the morning's portion of this meeting.

I also thank Ms. Coomaraswamy, Ms. Veneman, Ms. Hunt and Mr. Mulet for their informative presentations

The open debate format for the briefing on the annual report of the Chairman of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict is very appropriate. It provides an opportunity to express points of view concerning the Group's work and its contributions to the Security Council and other organs of the United Nations system.

The protection of children and the promotion of their rights are priorities for my country. Colombia has ratified the international instruments aimed at putting an end to the recruitment of minors. Moreover, our legislation establishes obligations for protection against the illicit recruitment of children and adolescents. We therefore support all efforts that contribute to that end.

The Security Council Working Group has adopted important guidelines for its work, including the terms of reference and the tool kit. My delegation wishes to stress the importance of the guides and modalities continuing to be implemented in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005).

The Security Council established essential principles for the implementation of that resolution. One is the priority that it assigns to situations on the agenda of the Security Council and the differentiated treatment given to situations included in annex II of the report of the Secretary-General. A second aspect is its recognition of the primary role of national Governments in the protection of children affected by conflicts, as well as the duty of United Nations entities to cooperate with Governments. The Council also established the principles that govern the management of information in the implementation of the resolution. In addition to being objective, accurate and reliable, information should be thoroughly verified in close consultation with the Governments concerned.

My delegation has taken note with interest of the suggestions contained in the document circulated by the presidency. Of particular interest is the suggested approach on the protection of children, both from a human rights perspective and with a focus on development issues.

My country's commitment to fully guarantee the rights of children — and of all our citizens — is part of a three-pillar Government agenda: security based on democracy; investment based on social responsibility; and social cohesion based on prosperity and freedom.

Our democratic security policy, which has made it possible to restore security on our territory while guaranteeing the viability of democracy and the strengthening of the legitimacy of the rule of law, is a fundamental basis for strengthening the programmes to prevent the forcible recruitment of children and adolescents and to enhance the protection of children affected by the actions of illegal armed groups. We have arrived at this stage by restoring the State monopoly on the legitimate use of force in order to confront these groups. Our citizens have placed their trust in these policies, which has made it possible to continue this process in a sustained manner, by building investment and social cohesion.

The elements of the Colombian State's strategy on children and armed conflict include the prevention of recruitment, along with protection, rehabilitation and reintegration. Since 1999 the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare has provided assistance to more than 3,600 children and adolescents who have been taken away from illegal armed groups. The national budget resources for this programme for the period 2002-2007 were over $14 million.

The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare promotes concrete action at the regional level to assist and protect children and adolescents, for inclusion within the development plans established by the offices of mayors and governors.

The Office of the Counsellor for Women's Equality has integrated the gender perspective in the public policy implemented by the Office of the High Counsellor for Social Reintegration, aiming at providing solutions for the impact of recruitment on children separated from illegal groups. Through this focus on social integration, children and adolescents are supported in regaining self-esteem, participation, education, income generation, restored family ties and health.

As programmes are implemented, they generate the need to make further efforts at coordination and

allocation of resources, especially in the field of training and education of human resources. International cooperation can play a significant role to complement those efforts.

In addition, since the establishment in December of our Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Children, Adolescents and Young Persons, an important diagnostic and awareness-raising effort has been under way at the institutional level. Several factors that fuel the problem have been effectively neutralized. This has entailed an enormous challenge to the country.

From that perspective, I would like to reiterate once again the resolute will of the Government of Colombia to continue to advance in the protection of children affected by the actions of illegal armed groups, to strengthen the policies of prevention in this area and to channel international cooperation efforts to that end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Cancela (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Uruguay would like to underscore the importance of today's open debate on children and armed conflict, and that of the annual report of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Once again, we have an opportunity to stress the importance of continuing to make progress in improving the working methods of the Security Council with a view to adopting substantive reforms of those methods as soon as possible, within the framework of Council reform.

Children are one of the most vulnerable sectors of society, but at the same time they are society's present and its future. In that regard, we are particularly gratified at the high level of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; we appeal to those States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and its Optional Protocols to do so. We also urge full and effective implementation by States already party to them.

Uruguay recognizes the contribution of the International Criminal Court, which defines as war crimes those crimes that involve sexual violence or the recruitment or enlistment of persons under 15 years of age or their use as active participants in the hostilities of armed conflict, along with the contributions made by other international tribunals that have included the protection of children in their respective spheres of jurisdiction.

The delegation of Uruguay appreciates the efforts of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and recognizes the role that the Council has played; here, there has been movement from words to implementation. We also know that this item is included in the agenda of the General Assembly, a forum in which year after year Uruguay plays an extremely active role with a view to strengthening and increasing the involvement and responsibility of that universal organ regarding a matter that falls within its mandate and that is of universal concern.

We also owe special recognition to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, whose mandate Uruguay fully supports.

The figures set out in recent reports on the impact of armed conflict are particularly disquieting. We are concerned at the continuing illegal recruitment of children in conflict zones, many of whom are abducted from refugee camps; at the various forms of sexual violence against children, which leave devastating permanent scars on their victims; by the cases of children detained in contravention of international law; at the systematic and deliberate attacks against schools; and at the nearly total impunity enjoyed by those who continue to commit crimes against children.

We reaffirm the need to assess the implementation and the format of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established through resolution 1612 (2005). We believe that its scope should be broadened to include all kinds of grave violations against children, for no violation is more serious than the others, and all must be given equal weight. We appreciate the broad and inclusive nature of the mechanism, which works with the involvement of all parties to a conflict: Governments, non-governmental armed forces, the United Nations system and civil society.

We believe that only through concerted and coordinated endeavours, through strengthening the norms of international law and through enhancing the use of available judicial mechanisms — in particular the International Criminal Court — will it be possible to formulate and implement plans of action against the

grave violations that continue to assail children in situations of armed conflict.

The delegation of Uruguay is of the view that greater attention needs to be paid to the reintegration of children associated with armed groups and of those who have been victims of other grave violations of their rights, in particular sexual abuse or exploitation.

In that regard, we agree that there is a need to take a broad and comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, tackling the root of the problem in order to achieve a sustainable, long-term solution.

We applaud the work being done jointly by civil society and the United Nations system, including peacekeeping missions, in building lasting mechanisms to protect children. We believe that the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in peacekeeping missions and the inclusion by UNICEF of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions should be strengthened and should be given the appropriate support in terms of human, financial and technical resources.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Ms. Gendi (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on the assumption by Viet Nam of the presidency of the Security Council, and to thank you for your invitation to this thematic debate on a very important theme, in order to address it from all its angles, whether security, political or humanitarian. I would also like to congratulate the Secretary-General and thank Ms. Coomaraswamy for her significant presentation and her untiring efforts to protect children in armed conflict. I would like to commend the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for its continuous efforts, which we hope will bear fruit in eliminating all forms of violence perpetrated against our children in armed conflict.

Egypt has studied with much interest the Vietnamese concept paper and what it contains on the need for the United Nations to address the growing linkage between development and the situations of children in armed conflicts. That important idea was raised at a time when the United Nations was concentrating on this matter only from the perspective of its effect on international peace and security and on human rights, without attempting to protect or establish the right to development as one of those rights. There is no doubt that development, when available in its full range, can help to overcome the causes of conflict, establish peace and enable a return to normal life in situations of conflict. That would, in turn, protect children from any threat against their lives and from any form of violence that might be perpetrated against them, especially during armed conflict, whether manifested through the use of child soldiers or through sexual or other abuse against children.

There is no doubt that the linkage between development, peace and human rights, as endorsed by our leaders at the 2005 World Summit, requires more attention on our part through the implementation of that linkage on the ground, especially in the light of the positive effects of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty on efforts to achieve peace, prevent conflict and resolve any future conflict. Special emphasis must certainly be placed on efforts to establish that linkage in the coming period on the part of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the General Assembly, in cooperation with the various entities of the United Nations, in particular the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF.

The report of the Working Group shows some of the limited achievements accomplished in several countries where children have suffered as a result of armed conflicts, including Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Sudan, the Philippines, Colombia and others. At the same time, the report indicates that the situation is still very volatile and that the phenomenon is still spreading around the world and taking new and different violent forms. That makes it imperative for the Working Group to intensify the preparation of reports on the situation of children in armed conflict in every armed conflict and in every situation where children are under foreign occupation in all its forms and manifestations.

While the Working Group, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF work to that end, special emphasis should be placed on the reintegration and rehabilitation of those children, their reintroduction to normal life and the creation of the necessary conditions for them to enjoy similar standards of education, nutrition and health to those enjoyed by children in advanced countries. That will require the commitment of more financial resources

and better coordination between the Security Council, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council. It will also require active participation between the private sector and civil society, with all its institutions, and the support of international financial institutions.

In order to achieve such a goal, Egypt was among the first countries to call for a visit by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, to examine the disgraceful humanitarian situations that children there are exposed to under foreign occupation and to come up with recommendations that could be feasibly transformed into decisions of the Working Group. However, the reports submitted by Mrs. Coomaraswamy on those visits, which were very objective and impartial, were only mentioned in passing in the report of the Working Group. At the same time, apart from a brief reference to the case of Afghanistan, the report did not mention anything related to children who are detained or in prison. No mention whatsoever was made of their situation, destiny or future, or of what kind of measures should be applied to guarantee their release and rehabilitation and preserve their future, especially in the case of Palestinian children detained in the prisons of the Israeli occupation forces and Iraqi children detained by the international coalition forces.

The Working Group must begin to look into the situation of those children, especially in the light of the adoption by the UNICEF Executive Board of the UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, in a way that guarantees an effective way of dealing with an entire generation of children who have been detained for vague or trivial reasons. That effort should be aimed at dealing with the root causes that led those children to resort to violence, at the forefront of which is occupation itself. Such a solution must be aimed at ending all forms of occupation and must endorse the need for occupying forces to respect human rights and their international obligations as an occupying authority and fulfil their responsibility to guarantee that all people enjoy their inalienable rights, especially the right to self-determination.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Ndabarasa (Rwanda): My delegation welcomes this opportunity to participate in the open debate on children and armed conflict and wishes to express our appreciation to the delegation of Viet Nam for organizing this debate. My delegation believes that this open debate should mark the beginning of a concentrated effort on the part of the Security Council to comprehensively address the issue of children in armed conflict, as set out in the concept paper of 7 July 2008.

Allow me to also take this opportunity to note with appreciation the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and a number of United Nations agencies — UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — and many other international and local non-governmental organizations that work to protect children in areas of armed conflict. The employees of those agencies endure numerous hardships, including threats to their personal security, and deserve to be commended.

My delegation firmly believes that tackling the issue of children in armed conflict requires a holistic and coherent approach. In that respect, we view conflict prevention as the key to addressing this scourge. Conflict and poverty act as enablers and lead to children unwittingly getting caught up in or coerced into armed conflict. Extreme poverty can lead to conflict, and inevitably children and women become the first victims. It is therefore imperative that concerted attention be given to addressing poverty by achieving the Millennium Development Goals and through conflict prevention.

The Great Lakes region has experienced the challenges posed by genocide and armed conflict and endured the consequences first hand. Rwandan refugees and nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are being held hostage by the members of the former Rwandan Armed Forces and Interahamwe, also known as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The FDLR continues to use that position to kidnap and forcefully recruit children into its ranks for use as soldiers, workers and even sexual slaves. In addition to this generation of young people being denied a future, they are indoctrinated with a genocidal ideology. Those young people are trained to carry and use guns and taught hate instead of arithmetic. That leaves the prospects for future peace and stability in the region severely threatened.

The Secretary-General's report contains some useful recommendations on the way forward. I will focus on two of them. First, the focus on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups in conflict afflicted areas has yielded some positive outcomes in the Great Lakes region and in other areas. However, it needs to be accompanied by a strengthening of the capacity of local authorities to enable them to establish the socio-economic infrastructure required to absorb demobilized former armed militias and to resettle internally displaced persons and refugees.

Secondly, my delegation believes that the Security Council should be firm and show leadership in dealing with the threat posed by armed groups in conflict-affected areas. My delegation welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 1804 (2008), which seeks to comprehensively deal with the threat posed by the FDLR in the Great Lakes region. It is that kind of action that, if comprehensively implemented in concert with a development approach, will help rid us of the scourge of children in armed conflict.

The plight of children in armed conflict is not an abstract concept or the subject of television documentaries or films — it is anathema to us all. The people of Rwanda, more than any in recent times, have experienced the absence of real peace and security and the impact it has on our children. My delegation therefore wishes to reiterate its firm commitment to addressing the plight of children in armed conflict and to international peace and security through our contributions to United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions.

We remain committed to actively supporting the Security Council in its efforts to adopt both a development and a conflict-prevention approach to addressing the plight of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malawi.

Mr. Matenje (Malawi): Let me begin by commending you, Sir, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict and thanking you for allowing my delegation to address the Security Council.

At the World Summit in 2005, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of children in armed conflicts. They also called upon States to take effective measures, as appropriate, to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, contrary to international law, by armed forces and groups, and to prohibit and criminalize such practices.

Despite that noble call, children continue to be kidnapped and forcibly conscripted or recruited into service around the world as armed fighters, guards, helpers or sex slaves. In the process, their rights are violated with impunity. Many die and others are displaced from their homes and communities, maimed or disabled and let to suffer untold physical, developmental, emotional, psychological, mental and spiritual harm. Because armed conflict destroys State structures that provide social services, children in armed conflict suffer from the loss of access to basic social services such as health care, education, water, sanitation and nutritious food, thereby deepening poverty. Those are issues of key importance to national and international peace and security, requiring the immediate, as well as long-term, collective attention of the international community.

In that regard, my delegation observes that some progress has been made at the international level in the development of norms, standards and guidelines aimed at combating the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict and at securing the release of children in armed conflict, supporting their reintegration into society and affording them the greatest possible protection from armed forces or groups. Those norms, standards and guidelines are incorporated into a number of instruments, for example the Paris Principles and commitments to protect children from recruitment or use by armed forces and armed groups, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1820 (2008), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, the Cape Town Principles on child soldiers in Africa and other international instruments. However, more needs to be done to protect children from the menace of armed conflicts.

In that regard, we agree with the call made by the President of the Security Council on 12 February to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention that would address the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner in order to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis, including by promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation, good governance,

democracy, the rule of law and respect for and protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child. However, that can be achieved only if the Security Council works in full cooperation with relevant organs of the United Nations, such as the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, that are mandated to deal with development issues.

With regard to the rule of law, we note with concern that most countries affected by armed conflict lack the capacity to bring the perpetrators of armed conflict to justice due to a lack of resources. While national Governments have the primary responsibility to provide effective protection and relief to children affected by armed conflict, they need to be assisted in strengthening their law enforcement and legal and judicial systems in order to be responsive to the security needs of their people. The United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council have an important role to play in that regard.

In addition, States that have not done so yet should be encouraged to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and ensure that their national legislation is aligned to the Convention. Most importantly, the Convention and its Optional Protocol must be fully implemented in order to render them meaningful in the fight against the use of children in armed conflict. That is because the obligation to protect and assist children, both in times of peace and in armed conflict, is a basic principle of human rights and humanitarian law. In that regard, in addition to engaging official State agencies, it is critical for the international community to find innovative ways of involving non-State armed groups in ways that do not undermine the rule of law in seeking lasting solutions to armed conflict around the world.

In conclusion, Malawi appreciates the work of the International Criminal Court, UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to address the use of children in armed conflict in all its dimensions. Malawi also takes this opportunity to encourage the Security Council to ensure that political considerations do not override the need to protect children from armed conflict. Malawi condemns the use of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate of the Security Council devoted to children and armed conflict. The level of the debate and the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister demonstrate the firm commitment of the Government of Viet Nam to that critical issue. I also commend the work done by Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to draw the international community's attention to the impact of situations of armed conflict on children.

The subject that we are discussing today was first presented in detail to the international community in 1996, in Mrs. Graça Machel's report on the impact of armed conflict on children. The firm and committed reaction to that report led to the creation of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and to the formulation of a series of important Security Council resolutions that established a process to enable the United Nations and its Members to address this very serious problem. We welcome the progress made by the Council, including the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the development of action plans to end the use of child soldiers, and the important efforts made by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The Government of Côte d'Ivoire fully appreciates the deletion of the parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire from the list annexed to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Those parties have been delisted because they have stopped recruiting children and have taken concerted steps to identify and release children in order to permit their reintegration. We welcome the fact that the Working Group established by the Security Council has taken note of the progress in Cote d'Ivoire, where parties previously associated with the illegal recruitment and use of child soldiers have put an end to those practices.

Côte d'Ivoire would like to take this opportunity to discuss a situation — one of which we are sometimes unaware — that occurs following the demobilization of children. Often, the reintegration of children into their community is not as easy as one would hope. Recidivism, or children's inability to

behave appropriately in their family or their community, is a problem that deeply concerns us.

My Government welcomes the considerable work carried out by UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and their partners. However, it is not possible to protect children without involving the Governments of countries that face conflicts or that are trying to rebuild after a conflict.

In that regard, the United Nations and the Security Council must focus their efforts on promoting national measures aimed at strengthening the protection of children, at effectively implementing programmes for the demobilization and reintegration of minors, at creating social, economic and legal conditions that will prevent recruitment and at preventing other offences committed against children.

The rehabilitation and reintegration of all children who have been associated with armed forces or armed groups are essential. The international community must thus continue to provide the resources necessary to implement and promote national rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in order to ensure the long-term viability and success of such interventions. Such programmes must also take account of the particular concerns of girl combatants and girls associated with armed groups. We call on partners to include support for health and education as a priority in their emergency programmes, so that education, sanitation and health services and children's health care continue in camps for refugees or displaced persons during an armed conflict.

We hope that the comprehensive efforts made at the level of the United Nations system and in cooperation with interested States produce concrete results that will improve the situation of children in armed conflict.

As the Secretary-General indicated in his 2007 annual report on this subject (S/2007/757), the heart of the process is the formulation of action plans by States and non-State actors to put an end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Such action plans have proved to be effective ways to guide and measure the progress made. However, I should like to emphasize the following three points.

First, the Security Council must intensify its efforts to prevent conflicts and safeguard peace, in order to protect children by preventing or reducing the causes of armed conflicts. However, when conflicts erupt, the Council must strive to increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and to improve the humanitarian situations in conflict areas.

Moreover, when we look at the issue of children in armed conflict, we must constantly respect and support the role of Governments, as stressed several times in resolution 1612 (2005). Governments bear the primary responsibility for protecting their children. Other parties must seek the cooperation of the Governments concerned so that they can together remedy the violations committed against children in armed conflicts.

The Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must improve their communication with the Governments concerned. They must recognize and support the positive steps taken by Governments to improve mutual trust. At the same time, politicization of the issue of children must be avoided. The protection of children should not be used as a pretext for interference in a country's internal affairs.

Finally, resolution 1612 (2005) must continue to serve as a basis for improving and perfecting the monitoring and reporting mechanism as well as the Working Group's activities in general. It is paramount that the Security Council address the issue of the scope of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Currently, the mechanism is activated only in the event of violations related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and it is applied systematically only to situations that are formally included on the Council's agenda. In fact, the mechanism should be automatically applied to all situations of armed conflict in which the safety and rights of children are violated by armed forces or armed groups.

In conclusion, I should like to urge the United Nations not to resort systematically to sanctions when dealing with the issue of children and armed conflict, because situations differ from one another. As for parties to conflicts, I urge them to fulfil their obligations by respecting international humanitarian law and protecting the rights of children.

Finally, with regard to development partners, during the period of post-conflict reconstruction they must give priority to reintegrating children into the family, school and society and must ensure that the resources provided are adequate and substantial.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Ms. Kafanabo (United Republic of Tanzania): We thank the delegation of Viet Nam for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. The situation of children in armed conflict is a serious concern and warrants special attention by the Security Council. We also thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the representative of the non-governmental organization for their contributions to the debate this morning and for their efforts to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

My delegation wishes to commend the efforts of the Special Representative and to place on record our support for her work. We also wish to commend the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, under the leadership of France. We call for more support for the Office of the Special Representative and for the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in the discharge of their mandates.

The Security Council has come a long way since the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), its first resolution on children and armed conflict, which has been followed by five other resolutions. Those resolutions and the presidential statements that have been issued on this subject matter have laid the foundation and the framework for the protection of children in armed conflict. We are encouraged by the progress that has been achieved in the protection of children in conflict situations as a result of continuous engagement by the Security Council on the issue.

We are further encouraged by the results achieved through the monitoring and reporting mechanism that was established under resolution 1612 (2005). However, we note that, despite those encouraging results, the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory. More concerted efforts are required to maintain the momentum and to further improve the lives of children affected by armed conflicts in all situations.

In that regard, we request that the Security Council consider monitoring the other grave violations in addition to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. We can start the addition of other violations in phases, beginning with sexual and gender-based violence as a trigger for action. That trigger is suggested in view of the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in armed conflict, as well as of the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence perpetrated against children.

The continued violation of the rights of children, particularly in situations of conflict, is a matter of serious concern. My delegation is further concerned by the escalating incidences of rape and sexual abuse of children, especially girls, in times of conflict. We strongly condemn all violations of the rights of children, including rape and gender-based violence, the use of children as instruments of war, such as human shields, perpetrators of attacks, spies and suicide bombers.

We also condemn attacks on civilians and public property, especially those targeting schools, teachers and recreational areas. We have to hold perpetrators of those crimes accountable so as to end impunity. In that regard, we acknowledge the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in bringing the perpetrators to justice and call upon Member States to support the ICC. We also urge national Governments to strengthen the rule of law in their countries and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Furthermore, we call upon the Security Council to consider targeted sanctions against perpetrators.

One of our greatest challenges in protecting children is to end conflict. We need to tackle the root causes of war as well as to address other political, economic and social issues that can improve the situation of children and other civilians in situations of conflict. It is thus imperative that programmes being undertaken in conflict areas have a strong focus on children. We request the Secretary-General to ensure that trained and adequately resourced child protection advisers be stationed in all peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, children's concerns should be mainstreamed in peace processes and in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes with a focus on long-term community-based reintegration. Adequate resources should be made available to those child-focused programmes. We urge the Security Council to remain seized of this issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's gratitude to the delegation of Viet Nam for convening today's meeting on children and armed conflict. This meeting provides an opportunity to renew our strong commitment to ensuring the protection and rights of children in armed conflict, as well as to review progress made in that regard.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her visit to Afghanistan and her comprehensive statement.

All children have the same needs and share the same dreams. They represent the future of our societies and mirror the State they live in. The Government of Afghanistan is still making efforts to rebuild its country devastated by 30 years of war that dramatically affected the lives of our children, particularly girls. The major victims of the war in Afghanistan are our children. Years of conflict in our country have destroyed the basic necessities of life, such as schools, health care, adequate shelter, water and food, and disrupted family relationships. They have also created stigma and post-traumatic distress and generated a pessimistic outlook on the future.

Afghanistan is strongly committed to reversing the impact of war on children and fulfilling its obligation to protect children. The improvement of the situation of Afghan children and the comprehensive protection of their rights is an essential precondition for the sustainable development of our State. It will also lay a solid foundation for our next generation to live in peace and prosperity and enjoy its human rights. Our vision for ensuring the protection and well-being of our children is to develop an environment that provides security, guarantees economic and social opportunities and respects the rule of law.

We have achieved considerable progress in improving the status of children since 2001. Nevertheless, today we are facing critical security challenges that jeopardize the gains made in the past seven years and undermine our collective efforts to improve the living conditions of our children and give them a promising and bright future.

Terrorism continues to be a major threat and drastically affects the daily lives of our people, particularly our children. The deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan is the product of the surge of terrorist activities carried out by Al-Qaida, the Taliban and other associated armed groups in the region. Terrorists have increased attacks in our territory, using barbaric acts and methods including car bombs, suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices directed at national and international forces. Such attacks deliberately target densely populated areas where children are the prime victims.

The Taliban is using the most atrocious practices conceivable to conduct its subversive operations. Terrorists are recruiting, training and exploiting children as combatants and sending them to operate as suicide bombers. As Afghan and international security forces become more astute at recognizing suicide attackers, the use of children is increasing because children are not generally objects of suspicion. Child suicide bombers also constitute an effective instrument of psychological warfare because the spectre of the child attacker is as terrifying as it is incomprehensible.

The intensification of the Taliban intimidation campaign through the burning of schools and clinics, the night-time dissemination of threatening notes and attacks against teachers and schoolchildren has created an atmosphere of terror and traumatizes children, which prevents them from going to school and ruins their future. Furthermore, it undermines our efforts at achieving development goals aimed at improving the living conditions of our citizens, including children, and ensures a gloomy future for our people.

The state of hopelessness resulting from years of living in conflict and from poor socio-economic conditions, supported by the brainwashing indoctrination provided in madrasas across our borders are creating favourable conditions for recruiting and training innocent children to target a wide spectrum of Afghan and international civilian and military personnel. We are deeply concerned about the rising number of children killed and injured by the Taliban and other foreign terrorist groups.

We would also like to express our grave concern about the loss of lives and injuries of children during counter-terrorism operations. In that regard, we call on our international partners to exercise maximum caution and to enhance coordination with Afghan security forces during operations in order to avoid the loss of civilian life and ensure the safety and physical integrity of children.

The protection of children in armed conflict is one of the most daunting humanitarian and security challenges that the international community faces today. Addressing the socio-economic needs of children in armed conflict and ensuring their rights requires an integrated strategy with a special focus on poverty alleviation, especially among the most vulnerable segments of our society, including widows and orphans.

The successful implementation of such a strategy requires full cooperation and coordination among the Government of Afghanistan, development partners and the United Nations agencies. We would like to call on donor countries and development agencies to assist us in achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication and good governance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Banks (New Zealand): I thank you, Mr. President, for initiating this debate on children in armed conflict. New Zealand also thanks the Secretary-General for his report (S/2007/757). New Zealand agrees with the report's recommendation that the Security Council should not limit its attention to the recruitment and use of child soldiers, but should give equal weight to all categories of grave violations against children, namely, killing and maiming, attacks against schools and hospitals, rape and other grave sexual violence, abduction and the denial of humanitarian access.

We were proud to sponsor recently Council resolution 1820 (2008) and welcome the recognition that children in armed conflict are acutely vulnerable to sexual violence. We look forward to the Secretary-General's next report, as requested in resolution 1820 (2008), and call for action to stop abuses against children.

We commend the progress made by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, with France as its Chair. We want to see it continue to publish conclusions that lead to strong and swift action against the perpetrators of grave violations against children. The Working Group is a vital component of a series of mechanisms for ensuring that children affected by conflict are protected.

We recognize the dedication of Special Representative Radhika Coomaraswamy to the commitments in her mandate and to the valuable findings she brings back from her field visits.

We acknowledge that today is the tenth anniversary of the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and take the opportunity to reiterate the central importance of the ICC in bringing to justice the perpetrators of abuse against children.

New Zealand commends all those involved, those countries where progress has been reported and especially the Security Council for the ongoing efforts to better ensure the safety of children affected by conflict. We call on the Council to continue its work to fulfil the mandate set out in resolution 1612 (2005), which we believe continues to provide sound foundations for the valuable work of the Special Representative.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nepal.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): Let me begin by congratulating Viet Nam on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this open debate on the important subject of children and armed conflict during Viet Nam's presidency.

Nepal appreciates the remarks made on the subject this morning by the Secretary-General; his Special Representative, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Ann Veneman; and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Mulet.

Armed conflicts continue to have a gruelling impact upon children. In most conflicts, children are often recklessly recruited by armed groups and left without much protection. In others, they are the ones who bear the brunt of the worst effects of war, including displacement. Sometimes they are also affected by sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Security Council's resolutions, including resolution 1612 (2005), and thematic debates have contributed immensely to addressing the plight of children in armed conflict. Although some progress has been recorded in the past decade to improve the protection and well-being of children in armed conflicts, much still remains to be done.

Ending conflicts is, without any doubt, the best way to protect children from them. Therefore, the issue

of children in armed conflict should be taken into account in the light of the centrality of peace processes wherever they exist. Nepal supports the concept of including the protection of children in peace agreements and United Nations peacekeeping missions, as long as they contribute to the cause of protecting children while ending the conflict.

Where a peace process does not exist, the protection of children should be given paramount importance in all situations of conflict. Nobody should be spared from accountability for their actions against children, and no culture of impunity should be tolerated.

The welfare and protection of children in armed conflict should be viewed from a comprehensive perspective. Nepal subscribes to the approach of finding a durable solution from the standpoint of rights and development. In that context, the international legal instruments for the protection of rights of children should be rigorously applied in all circumstances. A long-term strategy aimed at solving the root causes of the involvement of children in armed conflicts should be the way forward. In that regard, we welcome the proposal of the Office of the Special Representative to conduct research on root causes. There also needs to be some work on addressing the development perspective of children in armed conflict.

Nepal accords high priority to protecting and promoting the rights of children who have been victims of armed conflict. We are working closely with the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and the Government and the political parties in Nepal are fully committed to implementing various recommendations of the Group, especially in the context of the ongoing peace process. Among other things, we are working with United Nations agencies on the ground to prepare a rehabilitation plan for those minors who will be released from the cantonments soon, as per the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 21 November 2006.

The Government of Nepal is committed to ending impunity for crimes committed against children under any pretext. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, Nepal is taking measures to enact and implement the provisions of those instruments.

We are confident that our efforts will result in tangible achievements with the formation of a new government in the near future, which is likely to be headed by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), as the largest party in the Constituent Assembly that we successfully elected on 10 April of this year. The declaration of the Constituent Assembly to make Nepal a federal democratic republic, ending the 240-year monarchy in a peaceful manner, has heralded a new era of political transformation. Those and other political developments are likely to have a significant positive impact on the protection and welfare of children affected by the 10-year armed conflict that is coming to an end in Nepal.

Nepal commends the initiatives taken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in creating a synergy to bridge the efforts of various agencies in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict in various parts of the world. The Government of Nepal looks forward to her proposed visit to Nepal at a mutually convenient time.

In conclusion, I wish to confirm that Nepal is committed to working with the members of the Council to create an effective framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of children affected by armed conflict and in finding a lasting solution to this grave humanitarian problem.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Davide (Philippines): The Philippines welcomes this open debate on the important issue of children and armed conflict and congratulates and commends you, Mr. President, and the members of the Council for organizing it. Through it we may find lasting solutions and establish effective and durable measures that will prevent and eliminate the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. The full text of my statement will be circulated; I shall deliver an abbreviated version.

Each of us was a child. If we had not been loved, cared for and protected at that time, we would not have been here today. No one may successfully argue against the proposition that children are the best and most valuable treasure of every nation of the world. The Philippines' greatest national hero, Dr. José Rizal, enthrones children as the hope of the nation. It follows without saying that the abuse of children or denial of their rights is the destruction of the nation's hope and

future and the dissolution of any promise for its progress.

Thus, the Philippines places utmost importance on children. The Constitution of the Philippines makes the child the core of the Filipino family. It recognizes the vital role of young people in nation-building and directs the State to promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual and social well-being and to defend the right of children to assistance and provide them special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development.

The Philippines has a vast arsenal of statutes on the rights of or concerning the protection of children, such as the Family Code, the Child and Youth Welfare Code and, more important, Republic Act No. 7610, otherwise known as An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination. Apropos the issue at hand, that act includes provisions prohibiting the use of children in armed combat and protecting them from armed conflict. It establishes children as "zones of peace" and provides for the evacuation of children during armed conflict. In that regard, pursuant to Executive Order No. 56, which was issued in 2001 by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Philippines has established a comprehensive programme framework for children involved in armed conflict, which is implemented by 18 Government agencies with the active participation of civil society.

The Philippines is a State party to international agreements for the protection of the rights of children. More relevantly, it has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. At the regional level, in 2001 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations adopted a declaration of commitment on children.

The adverse effects of conflict on children are immeasurable and will affect them throughout their lives. Often, those effects lead to the destruction of their frail and still developing psyches, cause unspeakable mental anguish and, in the worst cases, bring about their untimely and undeserved deaths. The Philippines is fully aware of the need to rectify that situation as soon as possible, as well as to stop the torment of child soldiers and to reintegrate and rehabilitate the unfortunate children thus affected.

The Philippines has exerted vigorous efforts in that regard and is continuing to take the most effective action in cooperation with all stakeholders. Our positive efforts have been recognized by the international community, with the United Nations having cited and commended the very high standard of the legal framework in the Philippines, which effectively protects children. The Organization has also cited the Philippines' positive and constructive cooperation with the United Nations on the issue of children and armed conflict, in particular as regards the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

The Philippines would once again like to underscore its avowed policy to consider children as zones of peace, as I mentioned earlier. Moreover, the Government is doing all it can to prevent and eliminate the recruitment and exploitation of Filipino children in armed conflicts. Furthermore, many children involved in armed conflicts because of non-State actors have been rescued, rehabilitated and reintegrated into their families and communities by the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

A recent development worthy of note is the review being conducted by the Philippine Government to include provisions relating to children in armed conflict in the ongoing peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. That is consistent with moves to mainstream the issue vis-à-vis those two non-State actors, in particular in the context of the peace process. It must be stressed, however, that the Philippines reserves the exclusive right to deal with non-State actors in the Philippines.

Another development in the Philippines is the continuing work being done by the Inter-Agency Committee on Children Involved in Armed Conflict pursuant to the comprehensive programme framework to which I referred earlier. The Committee has organized dialogue workshops with frontline service providers. The project hinges on the three priority areas of the Committee, namely, first, improving monitoring and reporting of the Committee's cases; secondly, improving institutional coordination; and, thirdly, effectively rehabilitating and reintegrating into the community children affected by armed conflict.

The strength of the legal protection afforded to children in the Philippines, the comprehensive and

coordinated activities of the Government to protect, rehabilitate and reintegrate children affected by armed conflict and our excellent cooperation with the United Nations, which has brought about positive changes on the ground and resulted in increased protection and safety for children, constitute key indicators of progress. In the light of those measures, the Philippines recommends that the Security Council seriously consider ways of evaluating progress in the protection of children affected by conflict. In doing so, the Council would conclude that the Philippines can be dropped from the list of countries included in annex II of the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005). Due process now supports such a course of action.

The removal of the Philippines from the list would be a signal triumph vis-à-vis my country's commitment to doing justice to the children caught up in armed conflict, and to their loved ones. It would equally be a victory for the United Nations and would further encourage the Security Council to focus on other countries in dire need of help. It does not take a leap of the imagination to realize that there are more children in other places who are at risk or who are being deprived their rights, their futures and even their lives due to more serious causes than armed conflicts.

In conclusion, the Philippines wishes to reiterate its appreciation for the importance that the Security Council attaches to the issue of children and armed conflict. We assure the Council of our continuing cooperation on this issue. The Philippines would again like to place on the record that it looks forward to the visit of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in order that she can see for herself the relative calm and peace that prevail in my country and can see that it is not in a dire situation of armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to participate in today's open debate. My delegation appreciates the decision of the Vietnamese presidency to focus on ways and means by which the international community as a whole can contribute to achieving a long-term and sustained solution to the issue of children and armed conflict.

We also believe in a broad strategy of conflict prevention. In cases where conflicts occur, national reconciliation must be the preferred strategy. In that connection, we are speaking from our national experience. As a result of our policy of national reconciliation, 17 out of 18 insurgent groups have now returned to the legal fold. Peace and stability prevail in almost all quarters in Myanmar. The country is no longer in a situation of armed conflict.

We have also been addressing successfully the issue of under-age children in the military. In its summary, the report of the Secretary-General on Myanmar (S/2007/666) pointed out that "The Government of Myanmar has made a commitment at the highest level that no child under the age of 18 will be recruited". In that regard, I wish to stress that Myanmar's international obligation is not to recruit anyone under 16 years of age. However, our domestic rules and regulations provide for a higher standard. Under the Myanmar Defence Services Act and the directives of the War Office Council, the minimum age requirement for recruitment into the military is 18 years.

The Myanmar Armed Forces, including Tatmadaw Kyi, is an all-volunteer army; those who join the military service do so of their own free will. Forced conscription in any form is strictly prohibited. A new directorate has been established to oversee strict adherence to orders, regulations and directives in the recruitment process. However, there are cases where persons younger than 18 years of age have professed themselves to be older and have been able to enter military service. There are also cases where recruiters, particularly in far-flung areas, are lax in enforcing the minimum-age requirement.

In January 2004, therefore, the Government established a high-level committee for the prevention of the military recruitment of under-age children as soldiers. To achieve its objectives, the committee has adopted a plan of action to strictly ensure that children under 18 years of age are not recruited into the armed forces. Public awaréness measures have also been put in place. The Committee has also set up a task force composed of the relevant ministries.

What I would like to stress here is that a mechanism and the necessary regulations are in place to ensure that no one under 18 is recruited into the military. In order to raise awareness among those who

are involved in the recruitment process, officers of the Office of the Adjutant-General conduct talks on the protection and promotion of child rights and the directives and regulations governing the recruitment process. UNICEF is also invited to conduct lectures on the protection and promotion of child rights. New recruits found to be underage at recruitment centres or training bases are discharged and handed over to their parents or guardians. Punitive action is taken against recruiters who contravene regulations.

The Government has been providing detailed information regarding the progress made in its awareness-raising activities, the number of and specific particulars about under-age children discharged from the military and other pertinent data to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. That information was also provided to the resident representatives of the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF, who have from time to time had occasion to visit recruitment centres to witness the recruitment process first-hand. We also invited Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to visit Myanmar. During her visit in June 2007, the Government of Myanmar demonstrated its positive engagement by agreeing to set up a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

The Government is implementing a policy of stringent scrutiny at the recruitment stage, at the training stage and even after the training period. As a result of that strict scrutiny, between February 2007 and May 2008 some 1,049 underage persons were rejected at the recruitment stage. From 2004 to May 2008, 259 people who had slipped through the initial scrutiny were discharged from the military. From 2002 to January 2008, disciplinary action was taken against 44 military personnel who failed to strictly abide by the recruitment criteria.

Education is an important element in addressing the issue of child soldiers. The Government, actively assisted by UNICEF, has conducted a number of seminars and workshops. Between November and December 2007, a total of four workshops and seminars were held, in which both World Vision and Save the Children took active part. Those were followed by a number of multiplier courses. Between 1 February 2008 and 30 June 2008, we are able to conduct multiplier courses all over the country, attended by over 100,000 military personnel and their spouses.

I also wish to inform the Council that the six armed groups that have come back to the legal fold, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, have committed themselves and openly declared that they will not recruit child soldiers.

Resolution 1612 (2005) contains important elements for addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. Here, I wish to stress in the strongest possible terms the need for United Nations entities to abide strictly by the stipulations of resolution 1612 (2005), in particular regarding the dialogue established under the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism by United Nations entities with non-State armed groups. Allow me to also stress that resolution 1612 (2005) also stipulates that the mechanism must operate with the participation of and in cooperation with national Governments.

I wish to conclude by stressing once again that the Government of Myanmar has made a commitment at the highest level that no one under the age of 18 will be recruited into the military. We have set up a mechanism through a high-level committee for the prevention of military recruitment of underage children. We have also established working groups under the committee and have set up two focal points, one in the Ministry of Social Welfare and the other in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to cooperate with the United Nations Country Team.

The United Nations Country Team in Myanmar has been a good partner and is supportive of the Government's endeavours to prevent the recruitment of underage children into the military. We will continue our cooperation with the United Nations Country Team. We have high respect for and confidence in Special Representative of the Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy and her integrity. We will continue our cooperation with her.

Allow me to express the hope that the positive steps taken by Myanmar to address the issue will be accorded the recognition they deserve and that Tatmadaw Kyi will be removed from the annex of the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga.

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States, comprising Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict. We congratulate you on your leadership in taking the initiative to highlight the impact of armed conflict on the security of children.

The issue of armed conflict and its impact on children is of great importance to the world, and it is also relevant to our region. Children and young people make up a large percentage of our population, and the challenge of providing a safe and secure environment is of paramount importance to our leaders. We may not have the problems of child soldiers, as experienced by some United Nations Member States, but our region has experienced internal conflicts, and those conflicts have had a negative impact on our children and young people. We also face the challenge of cleaning up our environment to make sure it is free of old munitions from previous world wars. Old munitions are hazardous to our environment. They affect our waters and fishing environment. They also have a negative impact on the health of our children. Therefore, a long-term approach would be beneficial to maintaining a safe and secure environment for the next generation.

The work initiated by the Security Council has made a difference in exposing the detrimental impact of armed conflict on children. The Security Council's initiative on children and armed conflict has yielded positive results in extending more protection to children in conflict situations. The Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict has systematically reviewed 18 country reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and 13 sets of recommendations were adopted on the basis of the conclusions of the reviews. Nine peacekeeping missions involve child protection advisers, and the security of children has also been featured in peace agreements.

It is important that the Security Council sustain the efforts to implement the four formal action plans listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report in order to end the recruitment of child soldiers. We are aware that an estimated 1,400 children have been released as a direct result of compliance with the action plans. There is a need, however, to also focus on preventative measures with regard to that issue. Protecting the physical security of children is the first step.

We must take extra steps to ensure that children are cared for in post-conflict development. Children who have experienced the trauma of war, particularly child soldiers, should receive the necessary support to help them with reintegration into their communities. Many reports have shown that it is particularly difficult for child soldiers to be accepted by their families and communities due to the atrocities they were forced to commit during times of conflict. Efforts are needed, therefore, to work with Member States and grassroots organizations to make provisions for child soldiers. Many lack access to education, basic housing and health care. Younger children, particularly young girls, are easy targets for violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. The recent report of the Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking noted that the increasing demand for forced labour and sexual exploitation leaves children vulnerable.

It is important to sustain the health and well-being of children by eliminating possible security threats to their mental, physical and emotional well-being and to create an environment that promotes safety and healthy development for those children after they have been rescued. It is also important to stimulate economic development and growth in post-conflict settings so those children and young people will have access to education, vocational training and employment opportunities. In particular, it is important to provide our children and young people with educational and vocational opportunities to promote political and economic security within our region.

We hope that the Working Group will continue to monitor the treatment of children and child soldiers in conflict situations. Greater cooperative efforts between the Working Group and relevant United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNICEF, are important in making provisions to promote community-based reintegration for children in post-conflict development.

The preventative approach advocated to deal with the issue of children in armed conflict situations also applies to other threats to international peace and security. It is important to take active measures to address the security implications of cross-cutting

issues, as those issues are not labelled as traditional security threats but, in reality, have serious security implications. For instance, climate change is a cross-cutting issue that is relevant to international peace and security, and it is our hope that the Security Council will adopt a proactive approach to addressing the security implications of climate change, as it has done with the issue of children and armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Benin.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We express our appreciation to the representative of the United States of America for his masterly guidance of the work of the Security Council in June.

Benin, which conducted the negotiations leading to the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), welcomes the remarkable progress made thus far in its implementation. We pay a well-deserved tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Coomaraswamy; to the members of the Working Group of the Security Council and its main leader, France, co-sponsor of the resolution; and to all of those in the field who have provided new impetus to the follow-up mechanism and the communication of information on children in armed conflict.

The performance of the mechanism is indeed most commendable, in particular since the issuance of the independent study that made it possible to consider jointly the situations referred to in annex I of the Secretary-General's report, those situations which are on the Council's agenda, and those that are not the Council's agenda listed in annex II, on the basis of the mandate provided by resolution 1379 (2001). We encourage the Working Group to continue to work in the spirit of the universality of its mandate and the equitable treatment of all of the violations reported to it. We welcome the invaluable contribution of UNICEF to that positive evolution of the mechanism.

Progress made in the protection of children affected by conflict can be measured in the large number of children who have been liberated or demobilized in both categories. While we are delighted by those developments, there remains a great deal to do towards making a reality of our dream of a world without child soldiers, without children who are mutilated or killed, without schools that are bombed and without sexual violence being perpetuated on children; a world without war against children, who are the future of humankind.

The Council must tirelessly pursue its actions by maintaining pressure on parties to conflicts. Without belittling the advantages of the dialogue that has been advocated by the Working Group of the Security Council, in our view it is intolerable that we still have more than 15 parties to conflict that continue with full impunity to violate the rights of children in various ways, despite the ongoing efforts made by the international community to persuade them to mend their ways.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has begun to play an active part in combating impunity for crimes committed against children in armed conflict. The Court requires the cooperation of States to achieve its goals. We congratulate the ICC on its tenth anniversary.

For its part, the Security Council should no longer tolerate challenges to its authority if it intends to preserve the credibility of the mechanism and its own credibility in exercising the powers entrusted to it by the Charter. The effectiveness of the Council depends to a large extent on its internal dynamics.

There may be differences in the interpretation of resolution 1612 (2005) and of earlier resolutions, but at the time that the resolution was being drafted, we could not imagine that the Working Group would be deprived of the capacity to impose measures targeting those parties which violate the rights of children once verification of criminal acts had taken place.

We find ourselves in a situation which, back in 2006, was already of interest to the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight, which, in the first recommendation of its report, emphasized the disparity between, on the one hand, the objectives and intentions ascribed to the mechanism and its original intent and, on the other hand, the fact that, in practice, there was heavy emphasis on documenting verified violations and that specific action by the Council was still not forthcoming, despite the seriousness of the violations.

That is the case despite the relevant provisions of resolution 1612 (2005). In paragraph 8 (a), the resolution states that the Security Council decides,

inter alia, to entrust the Working Group with the recommendation of measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict; in paragraph 9, reaffirms that it intends to consider imposing, through country-specific resolutions, targeted and graduated measures against parties to armed conflict which are on the Council's agenda and are in violation of applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict.

Those paragraphs provide sufficient leeway for the Working Group to propose measures against the parties involved and for the Security Council to find the appropriate formula for follow-up to those proposals. It is our hope that the Council will be able to mobilize the necessary political will to make full use of the potential of resolution 1612 (2005).

If the general understanding is that the aforementioned provisions deal only with situations on the agenda of the Council, and if we conclude therefrom that the mechanism lacks the ability to act against parties in situations that are not on the Council's agenda, it is then up to the Council to bridge that gap. The earlier that is done the better, so as not to perpetuate the practice of double standards in its efforts to protect children in conflict situations.

We call on the members of the Council to work vigorously to strengthen international measures for the protection of children in conflict situations, both in terms of mandates and in terms of resources allocated to the various component parts.

At the same time, my delegation would like to draw the Council's attention to the need to become even further involved in the rehabilitation of child victims abuse in conflict situations and to ensure that poor communities are not left to deal alone with the physical and psychological trauma inflicted on those children.

The situation of children affected by armed conflict should enjoy all due attention in the context of peacebuilding efforts. The international community should further contribute to the social reintegration of those children by ensuring that they receive the education and support they require and to which they have a right if they are to grow and realize their full human potential. At stake are the future stability of their countries, the regions in which they are located, and international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Kavanagh (Ireland): Ireland welcomes this opportunity to address the Security Council on the subject of children and armed conflict. We fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union.

At the outset let me thank you, Mr. President, and the Government of Viet Nam for organizing this open debate on so important a topic.

Since the issue of children and armed conflict was formally placed on the agenda of the Security Council in 1998, the progressive engagement of the Council has yielded significant gains for children.

Ireland supports the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms on children and armed conflict established by resolution 1612 (2005). In that regard, we welcome the annual reporting of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict. The creation of the Working Group gives firm evidence of the international community's commitment to addressing that issue at the highest level.

Ireland welcomes the adoption by the Working Group, under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of France, of concrete conclusions, which contain increasingly specific requirements and recommendations. These remind States of their obligations and encourage them to take measures to strengthen child protection. We note that, in many cases, the conclusions have already had a positive impact, including with regard to drops in child recruitment and enhanced dialogue between parties to conflicts and the United Nations. Ireland calls upon all parties to implement the conclusions of the Working Group. We also call for the Security Council and the Secretary-General to look into the need to give the Working Group the means required to enable it effectively and transparently to continue its work for the benefit of children.

Ireland is the current Chair of the Human Security Network, a position that we will hold until May 2009. The harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children has been one of the priority issues for the Network since its establishment almost 10 years ago.

We continue to be a strong supporter of the valuable work of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We would like to take this opportunity to commend Ms. Coomaraswamy and her Office for their committed efforts in raising awareness, engaging with parties to conflict through her field visits and keeping this issue high on the international agenda.

Ireland also recognizes the need to promote a broad-based approach to the problem and, in that regard, fully supports — in addition to the work of the Office of the Special Representative — the endeavours of UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, along with non-governmental organizations, regional organizations and national authorities.

We would also like to underline the importance of the role that the International Criminal Court can play in the fight against the impunity of perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity carried out against children, including perpetrators who enlist and conscript child soldiers.

Ireland draws attention to the establishment of the European Union's Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, which could be drawn upon by other actors, and to the integration of that issue into the Union's development and humanitarian policies. In the context of the European Security and Defence Policy, the issue is also integrated into external crisis management operations of the Union, such as the European Union-led peacekeeping force, which is currently in place in Chad and the Central African Republic under a mandate conferred by the Security Council.

Children affected by armed conflict are among the most frequent victims of serious human rights violations and abuses. During an armed conflict, girls in particular are subject to widespread — and at times systematic — gender-based human rights violations that have far-reaching repercussions. As Chair of the Human Security Network, we have chosen to focus on the theme of gender-based violence. In that regard, we note in particular that the Secretary-General's report issued in December 2007 (S/2007/757) recommends, in its paragraph 160,

"that the Security Council give equal weight to all categories of grave violations, including not only the recruitment and use of children, but also the killing and maiming of children, rape and other grave sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access to children".

Successive resolutions of the Security Council have also recognized such grave abuses. Resolution 1325 (2000) recognizes the human rights of girls and their right to protection, including protection from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Resolution 1325 (2000) also recognizes the special needs of girls in post-conflict situations and the necessity of taking girls' rights and needs into account in designing peace programmes, peace agreements, camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. Most recently, Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) highlights the targeting of girls through the use of sexual violence and demands that all parties to armed conflict take appropriate measures to protect women and girls from sexual violence.

In closing, let me reaffirm that Ireland is committed to working closely with the United Nations system, as well as with other relevant international and regional organizations, to relieve the suffering of children in armed conflict and to bring an end to serious violations and abuses of children's rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Barnes (Liberia): I would like to thank the presidency of the Security Council for organizing this meeting to discuss and debate this very important matter. In view of the fact that my country, Liberia, is just emerging from a tragic drama in which children were devastatingly victimized in a brutal civil war, I feel morally obligated to add my voice to the ardent appeal for the international community in general, and this body in particular, to find practical and effective solutions to the issue of children and armed conflict.

For me personally, the problem of children and armed conflict and the far-reaching consequences of children being caught up in armed conflict — whether as innocent victims or as conscripted armed fighters trained and conditioned to perpetuate unspeakable violence against their fellow human beings — is not an abstract concept. As a result of our civil conflict, I am personally acquainted with quite a few former child

soldiers whom I have observed to be physically and emotionally damaged.

In many ways, the kids and young adults whom I know and who are ex-combatants are just that: children and young adults. Yet, upon closer examination, one can see the scars of deep hurt and pain in their eyes. At the slightest provocation, such individuals may be prone to resort to violence because they have been conditioned to respond to almost any situation with brutality. Their humanity has been buried deep beneath a tough, unfeeling exterior.

I encountered a young Liberian during a time when there was a brief respite in the fighting. He asked me for a job, and, although I had been warned that he was an ex-combatant, I wanted to help. Thus, I hired him. Most of my neighbours wanted nothing to do with this unfortunate young man and treated him like a pariah. Over time, we would talk and my young friend told me how he had gotten into the killing business.

He was only about 10 years old when rebels raided his village and killed his parents in front of him. Orphaned, he was soon urged to join another rebel group, as part of what was referred to as the "small boys unit", to avenge his family and just in order to survive. At first, his rebel commanders armed him with a slingshot and a machete. As a novice, he would hit his target with a stone slung from his slingshot and then finish off the stunned victim by chopping him to pieces with his machete. Eventually, as a sign that he was a fully matured killer, he graduated to the prized AK-47.

Most of my conversations with this young man left me speechless, but once I did ask him if he had any regrets. He said to me, "Only one. Once, an old man begged me not to kill him, and I shot him anyway." My young friend looked haunted. His humanity had been taken away. While he is only one example, there are countless other examples of children worldwide who have been directly involved in and impacted by armed conflict.

Our world is continually becoming a smaller place thanks to the phenomenon we all call globalization. I say that this globalization is a double-edged sword. Humanity can choose to be on the cutting edge or the bleeding edge of the globalization sword. If we of this generation do not do right by our children — who are the future — we can rest assured that the bleeding edge will be the dominant force of the future of our common humanity.

My delegation seizes this opportunity on behalf of the children of the world to plead to the collective conscience and morality of the United Nations — which represents the best hope for a future that is safe, free, just and prosperous — to take the bold and courageous actions necessary to protect our children and the future of our planet. We can choose to take those bold and courageous steps now and correct this scourge or pay the drastic price of a more violent and uncertain future. Left to its own devices, the phenomenon that produces children victims and killers today will only yield adult victims and killers tomorrow.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Ms. Rodríguez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Mexican delegation is grateful to Viet Nam for convening this public debate on an issue of great topicality on the international agenda and of great importance to the agenda of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Mexico notes with concern that the great majority of victims in armed conflict continue to be civilians, and in particular children, who have suffered from deliberate killings and maimings as well as the indiscriminate use of force, in violation of applicable international law.

My country's Government commends the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Working Group on this topic and UNICEF in implementing resolution 1612 (2005). Nonetheless, and despite those efforts, Mexico regrets the fact that the situation of children in countries in armed conflict continues to be serious. That is why the international community must continue to take action to eradicate the problem.

Mexico endorses the Security Council's appeal, reiterated in the presidential statement of 12 February, for the adoption of a broad-ranging strategy of conflict prevention that would address in a comprehensive fashion the underlying causes of armed conflict in order to guarantee better protection for children in the long term.

At the same time, my country applauds the resolve expressed by the Council that it will continue

to include or increase the numbers of child protection advisers in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and political missions, and reaffirms the importance of their also being included in demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. In that regard, Mexico attaches great importance to the inclusion of the issue of the protection and rehabilitation of children in peace negotiations, to the demobilization of child soldiers throughout any conflict, and to the application of preventive measures to ensure that they are not recruited again or suffer reprisals.

Mexico wishes to underscore its concern that children continue to be the main victims of the increase in the indiscriminate use of landmines and cluster munitions in countries in armed conflict and their effects in post-conflict situations. We would therefore encourage Member States to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions at the conference that will take place in Oslo in December.

Mexico believes it essential to combat the impunity of those who violate human rights and international humanitarian law as they continue to recruit and use children in armed conflict and commit other serious offences, such as the killing and maiming of children, sexual violations, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian assistance to children. In that respect, my country underscores the importance that those responsible for such crimes be brought to justice in national courts or international tribunals or even referred to the International Criminal Court for investigation and trial. We also support the idea that the Council should continue to adopt targeted sanctions against parties to conflicts that commit grave offences against children, in disregard of the recommendations of the Working Group and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

I note that Mexico condemns any act of sexual exploitation or abuse committed by United Nations personnel in which women and children are the main victims. In that regard, my country urges Member States to step up their efforts to implement the strategy of assistance and support to victims of such acts so that children can receive the understanding and support that they need.

Lastly, we stress our hope that the Security Council's call on the parties to conflict indicated in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/757) to formulate and implement tangible plans of action to put an end to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict will help to strengthen the overall framework of the Organization's action to protect children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Lila Ratsifandrihamanana, Permanent Observer of the African Union.

Mrs. Ratsifandrihamanana (*spoke in French*): I wish to echo all previous speakers who have spoken on this essential issue since this morning in commending the Vietnamese presidency on its initiative for convening this meeting. I would also like to pay tribute to the outstanding work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and to the valuable contributions made to today's debate by Ms. Ann Veneman, Ms. Kathleen Hunt and Mr. Edmond Mulet.

Much has been said since we began the discussion this morning, and all representatives of African countries have stressed, with particular reference to Africa, the crucial importance of the issue of children in armed conflict. The policy of zero tolerance for the recruitment of child soldiers and the abuse and atrocities that children suffer has been advocated since the adoption of resolution 1659 (LXIV) by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity in 1996. Moreover, the provisions of that resolution have been taken up once again in various other key texts of the African Union. The commitment of the leaders of the African Union rests, above all, on the protection of children in armed conflicts, the appeal for assistance from the international community, the non-recruitment of children under 18 as soldiers, the education of and assistance to former child soldiers, regional training programmes for members of the armed forces and the establishment of peace corridors during armed conflicts for the protection of children and for humanitarian assistance.

(*spoke in English*)

Africa was the first region to adopt a comprehensive instrument on the rights of children, namely, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child adopted in 1990, a year after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The member States of the African Union also endorsed the African common position entitled Africa Fit for Children, which articulated priorities aimed at improving the lives of children, including the right to protection in situations of armed conflict and foreign occupation. In 2007, a conference was organized in Egypt to adopt a call for accelerated action on the implementation of the Plan of Action for Africa Fit for Children 2008-2012. Under that document member States agreed to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. The plan of action focuses on the legislative and policy framework, the institutional framework, mobilizing and leveraging resources for Africa Fit for Children, and realizing the right to an education and to protection.

Other African Union organs and bodies, such as the Peace and Security Council, the Pan-African Parliament, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, as well as all regional economic communities, are actively engaged with respect to the question of children in armed conflict.

However, despite those efforts, pockets of resistance to the zero-tolerance policy of the African Union on the use and abuse of children in armed conflict can be observed in various conflict situations around the continent.

The question of children and armed conflict is certainly one that receives unanimous condemnation and entails our shared responsibility in order to strengthen responses for its total eradication. In that regard, I would like to make a few points.

First, in Africa and other parts of the world, illegal armed rebel groups are solely responsible for the use and abuse of children in armed conflict. Our response must thus include the strengthening of strategies towards specifically targeting them.

Secondly, the question of children in armed conflict is linked to the vulnerability and the weakening of families owing to poverty. It would therefore be crucial for the Security Council to lend its full support to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other global commitments to the eradication of poverty.

Thirdly, the impact of the involvement and abuse of children in armed conflict extends far beyond the person of the victim. It would thus be crucial to support the efforts of Governments and regional organizations, such as the African Union, which are first in the line of responsibility towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.

Fourthly, as provided in the Council's presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/6), the mobilization of necessary resources and access to them by parties would be crucial to facilitate the implementation of all recommendations by the Security Council and the international community as a whole.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the resolve of the African Union to work with the whole of the international community to ensure that the zero-tolerance policy towards the recruitment of child soldiers and the abuses to which they are subjected becomes a reality in Africa and all over the world.

The President: After consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council.

> "The Security Council reiterates its commitment to address the widespread impact of armed conflict on children and its determination to ensure respect for and implementation of its resolution 1612 (2005) and all its previous resolutions on children and armed conflict, and the Statements of its President on 24 July 2006 (S/PRST/2006/33), 28 November 2006 (S/PRST/2006/48), and 12 February 2008 (S/PRST/2008/6), which provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the protection of children affected by armed conflict, as well as the provisions on children contained in other resolutions, including resolutions 1325 (2000), 1674 (2006) and 1820 (2008).
>
> "The Security Council reiterates its strong and equal condemnation of the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law, killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abductions, denial of humanitarian access to children and attacks against schools and hospitals by parties to armed conflict, while acknowledging that the implementation of its resolution 1612 (2005) has already generated progress, resulting in the

release and reintegration of children in their families and communities, through, inter alia, a more systematic dialogue between the United Nations country task forces and parties to the armed conflict on the implementation of time-bound action plans.

"The Security Council reaffirms the need for States parties to comply with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto, for armed groups distinct from the State to refrain from recruiting or using children in hostilities, and urges States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying or acceding to those instruments.

"The Security Council welcomes the ongoing implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, in particular the efforts that have made possible the implementation of the mechanism in all situations listed in the annexes to the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2007/757), and invites the Secretary-General, where applicable, to bring the mechanism to its full efficiency, in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005).

"The Security Council welcomes the sustained activity of its Working Group on children and armed conflict, as outlined inter alia in the latest report by its Chair (S/2008/455), and as the monitoring and reporting mechanism is being implemented in a growing number of situations of armed conflict, requests the Secretary-General to provide additional administrative support in order for the Working Group to continue to fully carry out its mandate in an effective manner.

"The Security Council invites its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to continue adopting conclusions providing clear guidance to the parties to armed conflict and relevant international actors on the concrete steps that need to be taken in order to respect their obligations under international law, in particular Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, and proposing effective recommendations based on timely, objective, accurate and reliable information, to the Council with a view to promoting the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including through appropriate mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions. The Security Council welcomes the efforts by its Working Group to improve its working methods and encourages it to continue to do so with a view to further improving its transparency and efficiency.

"The Security Council commends the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, and underlines the importance of her country visits in facilitating better coordination among United Nations partners at the field level, promoting collaboration between the United Nations and Governments, enhancing dialogue with parties to conflicts in implementing applicable international law, including their obligations under Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), and thereby securing concrete child protection commitments.

"The Security Council also commends the work carried out by UNICEF, as well as other relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, within their respective mandates, the child protection advisers of peacekeeping operations and political missions in cooperation with national Governments and relevant civil society actors, in enhancing the activities of the United Nations Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting and promoting child protection at the field level, including through implementation of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and following up on the relevant conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

"The Security Council recognizes the important role of education in armed conflict areas as a means to achieve the goal of halting and preventing recruitment and re-recruitment of children and calls upon all parties concerned to continue to ensure that all children associated with armed forces and groups, as well as issues related to children, are systematically included in every disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, with a particular emphasis on education.

"The Security Council reiterates the need for stronger focus by all parties concerned,

including Governments and the donor community, on the long-term effects of armed conflict on children and the impediments to their full rehabilitation and reintegration into their families and communities, through, inter alia, addressing the need for providing appropriate health care, enhancing their exchange of information about programmes and best practices, and ensuring the availability of adequate resources, funding and technical assistance to support national strategies or action plans in the area of child protection and welfare, and community-based programmes, bearing in mind the Paris Principles to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment by Armed Forces or Groups, with a view to ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of their programmatic response to the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of all children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

"The Security Council looks forward to the next report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and reiterates its readiness to continue to review the relevant provisions of its resolutions on children and armed conflict, building on the provisions of resolution 1612 (2005), with a view to further enhancing the comprehensive framework of the protection of children in armed conflict."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2008/28.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.